



# An Introduction to Subtitling

3<sup>rd</sup> Stage

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# What is Subtitling?



- **Subtitling** is the process of adding text captions or subtitles to a video or film to provide a written representation of the dialogue and sometimes other relevant audio elements, such as background noises or music.
- Subtitles are typically displayed at the bottom of the screen and are used to translate spoken language into written form or to make audio content accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. They can also be used to provide translations for foreign language films or to help viewers understand content in a language they may not be proficient in.

# History of Subtitling



## 1- Silent Film Era (Late 19th to Early 20th Century):

- Subtitling originally began as intertitles, which were text cards inserted between scenes in silent films to convey dialogue, narration, or other important information to the audience.
- These intertitles were typically used for translation purposes when films from one country were screened in another, allowing audiences to understand the plot and dialogue.

## 2- Introduction of Sound in Films (1920s):

- With the advent of sound in films, the need for intertitles diminished as actors' voices could now be heard.
- Subtitles evolved to become more focused on translating foreign-language films into the language of the target audience.

# History of Subtitling

## **3- Post-World War II Era:**

- Subtitling became more standardized and widely used as international film distribution expanded.
- Subtitles were primarily used for translating foreign-language films and making them accessible to global audiences.

## **4- Development of Subtitling Techniques:**

- Subtitling techniques continued to evolve, with improvements in timing, font styles, and placement on the screen.
- Techniques like "burned-in" subtitles (permanently added to the film) and "soft" subtitles (user-selectable) became common.

# History of Subtitling



## 5- Digital Revolution (Late 20th Century):

- The transition to digital technology in the late 20th century revolutionized subtitling and made it easier to create, edit, and distribute subtitled content.
- Subtitling software and digital formats made it more efficient to produce and distribute subtitled films.

## 6-Accessibility and Language Learning:

- Subtitling began to serve broader purposes, including accessibility for individuals with hearing impairments.
- Subtitles became a valuable tool for language learners, allowing them to watch foreign-language content with subtitles in their native language.

# History of Subtitling



## **7- Streaming Platforms and Globalization (21st Century):**

- The rise of streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime expanded the demand for subtitling as content was made available to global audiences.
- Subtitling services became crucial for the globalization of entertainment and media.

## **8- Advances in Machine Translation:**

Machine translation tools and AI-driven subtitling solutions have emerged, making it faster to create subtitles, though human oversight is still important for accuracy and quality.



The field of audiovisual translation (AVT) has been a professional practice since the early days of cinema in the 20th century. However, it didn't receive significant scholarly attention and a surge in practitioners until the mid-1990s, when digital technology became prevalent, and the production and distribution of audiovisual content expanded significantly.

# Development of Subtitles



Elks (2012: online) highlights, “children will spend an entire year sat in front of screens by the time they reach seven”, with an average of 6.1 hours a day spent on a computer or watching TV and with “some ten and 11-year-olds having access to five screens at home”. In the battle between the paper and the digital page, it is the latter that seems to be winning.



# Subtitlings



Subtitling, along with dubbing and voiceover, is a practice constrained by the need to reach synchrony between the linguistic target text (TT) and these additional translational parameters of images and sound as well as time.

The subtitles should not contradict what the characters are doing or saying on screen, and the delivery of the translated message should coincide with that of the original speech.

# Reiss' Text Typology



Reiss (1971/2000), discusses the significance for translation of the multimodal nature of the source text (ST) in her text typology for translators distinguishes three initial groups, namely

- (1) Content-focused texts,
- (2) Form-focused texts, and
- (3) Appeal-focused texts.

- To these, she adds a fourth, overarching category that she refers to as **audiomedial** texts, which, in her own words, “are distinctive in their dependence on non-linguistic (technical) media and on graphic, acoustic, and visual kinds of expression.
- A decade later, she revisited the term and changed it to **multimedial**.

# Snell-Hornby's Classes



Snell-Hornby (2006: 85) later coined four different terms for four different classes of text that all depend on elements other than the verbal:

1. **Multimedial** texts (in English usually audiovisual) are conveyed by technical and/ or electronic media involving both sight and sound (e.g. material for film or television, sub-/surtitling);
2. **Multimodal** texts involve different modes of verbal and nonverbal expression, comprising both sight and sound, as in drama and opera;

# Snell-Hornby's Classes



3. **Multisemiotic** texts use different graphic sign systems, verbal and nonverbal (e.g. comics or print advertisements);
4. **Audiomedial** texts are those written to be spoken, hence reach their ultimate recipient by means of the human voice and not from the printed page (e.g. political speeches, academic papers).



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Trosborg, A. (1997). Text typology and Translation. In *Benjamins translation library*. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.26>